

PREF and Plainfield team up with sidewalk project

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"We're starting at the grassroots level of the interviewing process. It's our hope we can find employers in the community to see the work they've done and see that 'this individual is a valued employee.'"

PREF Superintendent, Michael Lloyd

Plainfield— The Town of Plainfield and the Plainfield Re-Entry Facility (PREF) have partnered in an effort that is designed to help both entities.

Inmates at PREF, referred to as "residents," were interviewed and "hired" to complete sidewalk reconstruction along Center Street, in part of the redevelopment of downtown Plainfield.

Chamber of Commerce President Kent McPhail, who is also a member of the town council, came up with the idea of the partnership. Contractor John Albertson of Albertson and Son Inc. has been in the concrete business for 37 years, and was hired by the town to serve as project manager. He and two assistants are overseeing the work crew.

The four-member crew was selected out of a pool of 20 applicants, all of whom have less than six months left to serve. PREF Superintendent Michael Lloyd said the entire goal of the PREF program is training the residents for re-entry into society. "We're starting at the grassroots level of the interviewing process," he said about the concrete project. "It's our hope we can find employers in the community to see the work they've done and see that 'this individual is a valued employee.'"

When Albertson interviewed the 20 prospects, he said he was looking at their appearance, their demeanor, interaction with others, and leadership skills, among other traits.

"I have certain standards for behavior," he said. "I'm not just going to take guys who are great finishers, I'm going to get four really great guys."

Other requirements included being within six to eight months of release; being able to drive — they may not currently have a license, but they must be able to obtain one; and have a GED or higher education.

The idea of having PREF residents learn how to pour concrete falls into the logic that it's a job that they can do after they're released to earn a decent wage.

"The wage they could earn pouring concrete could support a wife and child easily in a modest environment," Lloyd said. Albertson added that there are millions of yards of concrete being poured in Plainfield, meaning the job is in-demand for skilled workers.

Plainfield has set aside four to five months to get the project finished, which is much longer than it would take a concrete company to come in and finish it. While working, the residents will learn concrete pouring, forming, and finishing.

"The town wants to give these guys a chance to learn," Albertson said.

Lloyd and Albertson both stressed that they aren't going to baby-sit the workers. They were selected and it has to be their choice to get up and go to work each morning.

"You have to work hard," Lloyd said. "Lazy people aren't successful. We might as well get them in the mindset 'this is what you're going to do when you get out.'"

A typical day for PREF residents working on the Center Street Project starts by leaving the PREF facility at 7:30 a.m., arriving at the site at 7:45 a.m., taking a half-hour sack-lunch break, stopping at 3 p.m., cleaning up, and leaving the site at 3:30 p.m. They are working three days a week, with two days set aside for classroom math and skill-assessment training.

"They have already worked hard to get into this program," Lloyd said. "Everybody in the world has stumbled at some point in time." In order to be accepted into PREF, residents must apply from other facilities. It currently houses about 330 residents, and has a capacity for 480. Part of the reason it isn't filled completely is because officials are very selective about who is accepted into the program.

Since it opened Jan. 1, 2006, PREF has released 152 offenders. Of those, only two have returned to the Department of Correction (DOC).

Statistics say that four out of every 10 offenders return to the DOC within three years, and 97 percent of all offenders are released. Last year alone, 17,000 inmates were released in Indiana, which averages to 50 per day.

Officials at PREF are trying to change the statistics by teaching residents job skills, giving them the opportunity to find skilled work after leaving.

"We want them to always be successful," Lloyd said. "There's knuckleheads out there, and there will always be knuckleheads, but it's important we try to help make them successful."

Other programs at PREF include work-release programs and opportunities to earn credits toward a college degree, which 20 percent of the residents already have.

"My goal is to train every man who comes through this door to go to work release," Lloyd said.

In order to go into the work release program, residents must have six months or less left to serve, and must live near Marion County, because that's where most of the work-release jobs are. The purpose of the program is for residents to obtain a job, and keep it once they're released.

PREF is different from other prisons in that it's more like a college campus. Residents are given freedom to move about the grounds as they please. They live in dormitories, and can choose whether to go to the cafeteria for meals.

Residents involved in the Center Street project are currently working on a smaller sidewalk project, in an alleyway just beside Success Express downtown on U.S. 40, and once they've completed it they will move on to Center Street itself.

Residents may notice a storage shed along Center Street that has the Town of Plainfield logo on two sides and the PREF logo on the others. The town purchased the materials for the shed, and the residents constructed and painted it.

The shed will be used to house the construction materials used for the sidewalk project.

About The Department of Correction

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department's home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department's Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.